

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION

August 5, 1970

State Dept. review completed

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley,
U. S. Ambassador to Laos
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Mr. John H. Holdridge

TIME & PLACE: Dr. Kissinger's Office, July 23, 1970

SUBJECT: Ambassador Godley's Comments on Developments
in Laos

Dr. Kissinger began by informing Ambassador Godley that the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board had reported that Ambassador Godley was doing a great job in Laos. Dr. Kissinger added that Ambassador Godley had more guts than most people in his Service, which was much appreciated here.

25X1 Ambassador Godley thanked Dr. Kissinger for these remarks, and went on to raise a specific question: the U. S. personnel limitations in Laos. The ceiling established by the President was 1040 Americans, and Ambassador Godley wanted to know whether if he were to come in with a request for any more, there would be any heartburn in the White House. Dr. Kissinger asked how many additional people might be involved, and Ambassador Godley said that at the most there would be 80 more. Some were already there on TDY, and would be shifted over to permanent change of station. He didn't want to be pinned down on a fixed number. Dr. Kissinger declared that the President as a matter of principle wanted to make a maximum effort in Laos, and regardless of what messages might be sent to Ambassador Godley [redacted], this would remain the President's wish. ~~The President wanted maximum pressure to be maintained during the summer, and if Ambassador Godley came in with a request for more personnel as being necessary for this purpose, his, Dr. Kissinger's, instinct was that the President would agree. 80 could be accepted, but if the number could be squeezed to 40 we would be happier since there was in effect a commitment not to increase the numbers. However, if~~

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25X1 Ambassador Godley told us that he had to have the extra personnel, this would be acceptable.

Ambassador Godley said that if more Cambodian SGUs were desired, it could be arranged. He had checked with [redacted] and with [redacted] Souvanna didn't mind; in fact, he would be delighted. Souvanna regarded the Cambodians as "brown folk," similar to the Lao, while the South Vietnamese were "yellow folk." Souvanna would be willing to live with the existing PRAIRIE FIRE operations, but there would be trouble if these operations were extended westward. It would be better to work out of the Bolovens with Cambodian and Lao SGUs. Ambassador Godley felt that these operations would be effective, but he was not so sure about the effectiveness of South Vietnamese operating in South Laos.

Dr. Kissinger questioned Ambassador Godley about the possibility of a Communist peace offensive in Laos. There apparently had been some feelers from the Russians, but if a peace offensive was in fact, underway, the President's present disposition was not to accept it unless it included Vietnam. Ambassador Godley thought that it would be difficult for the Lao to refuse to respond to a peace offensive. The Lao Armed Forces were extremely tired, and had lost lots of men. Souvanna, however, would be cautious.

25X1 Dr. Kissinger brought up Ambassador Godley's testimony before the Symington Subcommittee, wondering in particular how Senator Fulbright had treated him. Ambassador Godley expressed the opinion that the hearing had gone quite well.

Ambassador Godley noted that he had made a memorandum covering the hearing for the record.

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Dr. Kissinger asked if Long Tieng could be held during the dry season, to which Ambassador Godley replied that it could be held certainly until after the U.S. elections. When Dr. Kissinger asked if it could be held afterwards, Ambassador Godley stated that if the Lao could push out in a crescent West, Southwest, and South of Long Tieng it would be possible to hold the town. In response to a further question from Dr. Kissinger on the fighting capacity of the Meos, Ambassador Godley described them as being virtually out of the war. Many of the Meos had gone off to take care of their families, although little by little they were coming back. The Lao forces at Long Tieng now consisted of a national guerrilla force, i.e., were made up of units drawn from all over Laos. Vang Pao was still the best Lao general, but he was not as good now as he had been last year. He was tired, and his charisma was down. He had a habit, too, of not using his staff, and was a one-man artilleryman, even though he was an effective political leader. Nevertheless, he was still the best the Lao had, and there was no one else on the scene. In further describing the makeup of the Lao forces, Ambassador Godley observed that what had been Meo battalions a year ago were now all 40 percent Lao, that is, of non-Meo personnel.

Dr. Kissinger asked about the fighting capacity of the North Vietnamese -- were they still good? Ambassador Godley replied that they were very good. Vang Pao had a practice of cutting open the stomachs of NVA casualties to see if they had been eating well, and had found them still to be well fed. There were no 16-18 year olds among the NVA troops. Originally, the 316th Division had not fought well, for example, the soldiers had jumped out of their foxholes to fire at attacking aircraft, but they had learned.

Dr. Kissinger asked if the B-52s had helped. Ambassador Godley shouldn't hesitate to ask for B-52 support -- if a request got to this building, it would be approved. Ambassador Godley declared that the B-52 raids in Northern Laos had produced more BDA than in any other area. The results had been extremely good. He indicated that air activity in Laos had been cut down by the Seventh Air Force, but that he didn't object because the present heavy rains had reduced the effectiveness of air action.

Dr. Kissinger asked if Ambassador Godley foresaw another Communist dry season offensive next year. Ambassador Godley suggested that a peace offensive might be expected instead, which as he had mentioned might be attractive to the Lao. In the face of this, we needed to maintain our ground capability in the South, and to hit the Trail. Ground action in South Laos depended completely on the help provided by the RLG. All the officers in the SGUs were from the FAR.

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25X1 Ambassador Godley described the [redacted] SGU operations in Laos as "superb" in contrast to MACSOG PRAIRIE FIRE operations, none of which were undertaken without U.S. participation. There were no U.S. personnel in the SGUs, just Lao. The SGU operations were much better than those in the PRAIRIE FIRE program. [redacted]
[redacted]

25X1 One other point which Ambassador Godley wanted to raise in connection with the U.S. operations in Laos, as distinct from the Steel Tiger strikes, was that the total cost was less than \$500 million per year, including AID, MASF, [redacted] and the bombing. In all this, we were not losing a single American, and we were killing over 30 North Vietnamese a day. \$500 million was what one U.S. division cost us in South Vietnam. In Laos, this same sum enabled us to tie down two North Vietnamese divisions, numerous Binh Tram, plus many trucks and anti-aircraft artillery sites. We were getting a bigger bang for a buck in Laos than anywhere else.

Dr. Kissinger observed that there was no trouble within this Administration concerning anything Ambassador Godley had said. He wondered how long the North Vietnamese could keep going under the circumstances which Ambassador Godley had described. The conversation concluded with a remark by Ambassador Godley that the North Vietnamese could probably go for some time yet, but undoubtedly had been hurt by their losses.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

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July 22, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Appearance Before the Symington Sub-Committee

Yesterday I "briefed" the Symington Sub-Committee on Laos. During the course of the discussion, Senator Fulbright spoke with force, but in an agreeable manner, about our secrecy concerning Lao matters.

None of the Senators appeared to be interested in this matter and Senator Fulbright said he knew all about it already and that the State Department should be as forthcoming with the Senators as [redacted] etc.

Subsequently, I was questioned by Mr. Roland Paul. Present in the room at that time was Mr. Pincus as well as Mr. Carl Marcy's assistant. Mr. Paul asked me [redacted] and I told him [redacted]

In so doing, I once again drew his attention to the high sensitivity of this information. He jotted down on one of a number of cards he had in front of him something about my response.

P.S. There was no mention of B-52s.

Ambassador G. McMurtrie *gdm:itm*

cc: J - U. Alexis Johnson
EA - Marshall Green
White House - Mr. Lehmann
CIA - Mr. Helms

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